

Business Booming, Politics Hot Topic in St. Paul During Republican Convention

By Lisa Ferdinando
St. Paul, Minnesota
05 September 2008

Politics was the hot topic in the streets of St. Paul for the four days of the Republican National Convention. With tens of thousands of people descending on the city for the convention, businesses stayed open late, political merchandise was flying off the shelves and restaurants were filled with convention attendees. But with all the hoopla of hosting a national convention comes tight security, protests and disruptions to ordinary life. Lisa Ferdinando has this report from St. Paul, Minnesota.

Afternoon business was booming at Mickey's Diner, a popular fixture in St. Paul that has become a favorite spot of some conference delegates and journalists. Members of the Arizona delegation crowded the small eatery, discussing politics over lunch one day, excited to be a part of the Republican National Convention and beaming with pride that the Republican candidate, John McCain, hails from their state.

John Munger is from the city of Tucson.

"It's fun, and especially this year, with our own favorite son being the presidential candidate," said John Munger. "Arizona is always on the map, but this year is special."

The four-day convention has been good for the city, bringing in business and putting St. Paul in the national and international spotlight. The Minneapolis-St. Paul 2008 Host Committee has estimated the convention would bring at least \$150 million to \$250 million in additional revenue to the area.

Russell Klein co-owns an upscale restaurant, called The Meritage, close to the convention site.

"This has just been a huge boon for us," said Russell Klein. "I know that's inconsistent. I know that there are other people who are saying that they are not seeing what they expected. When we did our projections, thinking about what we could possibly expect from the convention, we're going to pretty much going to meet our highest level of expectations."



AP Photo

McCain, Palin buttons for sale in St. Paul, Minnesota, 04 Sep 2008



VOA Photo - L. Ferdinando

Political memorabilia vendor Carl Chambers displays a shirt for sale

Political memorabilia is always a hot seller. Carl Chambers of Nashville, Tennessee, says business has been brisk since he set up shop on the sidewalk, selling about \$100 - worth of merchandise in 20 minutes

"The buttons are the big sellers," said Carl Chambers. "Anything with Palin on it is obviously a big seller. Right now, everyone wants the McCain-Palin stuff."

But along with good news for the economy, come the headaches associated with such a high-level event - rerouted traffic, protests and extremely tight security.

But, St. Paul resident Jeff Wenberg, strumming his guitar, was not bothered much by all the security, saying it was all part of being the host city. Although most of the protests were peaceful, Wenberg questioned why some demonstrators would smash windows and wreak havoc in his town.

in St. Paul, 04 Sep 2008 "What is that really accomplishing? I don't see the point in it, but I am not an anarchist either," said Jeff Wenberg.

Just as quickly as tens of thousands of out of town visitors descended on the city of 300,000, they will leave as the convention comes to a close.

What is restaurant owner Russell Klein going to do after the long hours of work? Go on vacation, he says with a laugh.

Print